

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL:
AN EXPLORATION OF EVIL AND THE EVIL ONE THROUGH THE LENS OF
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A Practical Research Project

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study presents as its thesis that Satan, a supernatural being, actively engages us to commit sin so that we might be separated from God. The study is designed to practically explore evil and the Evil One. The subject is not only examined using Scripture and scholarly works, but also personal experience. The end goal is to better prepare believers in Christ to deal with spiritual attacks. As exemplified in my personal story, the demands of ministry can find pastors completely depleted, and awareness and vigilance are needed to avoid the devastating effects of neglect for our own spiritual care.

There is no shortage of works on the topic of evil and the devil, both ministerial and academic. The primary distinction of this doctoral thesis is that a significant component is written from a first-person perspective.

The study begins with the author's personal story because without it, the author never would have recognized the need for heightened awareness of Satan's subtle but persistent effort to tear down our ministry, relationship with God, and every last gift God has given us. Through that lens, the study moves to what the Bible says about how evil and the Evil One entered the

world and changed it forever with a particular focus on the opening chapters of Genesis. Next, there is consideration of whether there is a devil at all, or whether that is merely myth and all that exists is evil and sin without a supernatural being promoting it. Drawing on the there iconclusion from both Scripture and personal experience that evil is, in fact, driven by a supernatural being, the study focuses on the methods Satan employs so readers can be more prepared to fight attacks. Finally, the study concludes with a brief examination of what the Bible promises in terms of ultimate victory over sin and Satan.

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Introduction

“Adam!” I said to my son, “No, no. Don’t touch the fireplace! It will hurt you!” With a defiant stare, he placed both hands on the glass. It was as if he heard the serpent himself saying, “Adam, you will surely not get hurt. For your dad knows if you touch this glass, your eyes will be opened.”

Not long after my son began to conjure up phrases, he uttered this one after being punished by my wife: “I don’t love you.” She was heartbroken, and so was Adam. In a tearful exchange, they embraced with Adam promising profusely to never say those words again. Of course, the very next punishment brought with it an even more emphatic, “I don’t love you!” Later, he would amplify the phrase, “I don’t love you! You are *outta* the family!”

How is it possible that a child will defy us at their very first opportunity to do so? Before uttering our first words, we have already succumbed to the ability to sin. In fairness, a child’s development involves healthy curiosity into life’s experiences. But as every parent knows, the child’s actions from a very early age go beyond curiosity and include what can fairly be considered sin.

Sin is most simply defined as “human activity that is contrary to God’s will.”¹ Sin is not synonymous with evil, which can be both moral, involving humans, and natural (involving the natural world). Moral evil is generally attributed to a person who has caused harm or brought about a negative event due to their intentional action or inaction. As such, moral evil can be distinguished from natural evil which results from occurrences in the natural world without human action or intervention, such as a tidal wave that wipes out an entire town.

¹ J. Jordan Henderson, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. “sin,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states that unlike moral evil, “sin is a fundamentally theological conception.”² So, we engage scripture from the writings of the Torah, the exhortation of the prophets, the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, and the writings of the New Testament to define sin as human activity that is contrary to the will of God and inclusive of all that separates us from God.

Sin stands in opposition to God.³ This division, and particularly the forces behind it—for Christianity, God and Satan—is a dualism that is common among many world religions.⁴ Yuri Stoyanov explains that this religious dualism “lies in the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil,” and this dichotomy exists not only in “the ‘high’ religious systems such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and the various Gnostic traditions, but also to the cosmogonies of pre-literate cultures in Eurasia and North America.”⁵ We tend to think of religion as coalescing around a belief in a higher power. But world religions also share a common ground surrounding sin and where it comes from. Ancient Egyptian religion,⁶

² F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1515.

³ “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.” (Psalms 5:4 ESV).

⁴ Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm3q2.5>.

⁵ Stoyanov, *The Other God*, 3-4.

⁶ “Extant documents indicate that the ancient Egyptians did have a code of ethics, and hence a concept of sin. For instance, in the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant (ca. 1800 BC), a peasant named Khun-anup is tricked into damaging his master’s property, for which he is beaten.” Henderson, “Sin.”

Zoroastrianism,⁷ Islam,⁸ Buddhism,⁹ and Christianity all share concepts of evil and an evil influencer.

The Book of Genesis presents a truth that is universally known: humans sin. Genesis gives us the account of Adam and Eve sinning; however, Paul in writing to the Romans argues that this act was imputed to the rest of us. “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”¹⁰

This study presents as its thesis that there is a literal Satan, a supernatural being, that actively engages us to commit sin so that we might be separated from God. But why would God allow this? The answer is to point us toward God and God’s love. Further, this thesis claims that without Satan, there is no sin. Without sin, there is no cross.¹¹ The cross represents death and the

⁷ In the ancient Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism, there was an “Evil Spirit, Angra Mainyu (Pahlavi Ahriman), who was wholly evil, ignorant, and malign, likewise uncreated, but doomed in the end to perish.” Mary Boyce, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Zoroaster, Zoroastrianism,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁸ Islam has a spirit named “Iblis” who assumes “the role of [the] devil in bringing harm to human beings.” Winfried Corduan, *Pocket Guide to World Religions*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), s.v. “Iblis,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁹ Buddha is tempted by Mara to “abandon the life of asceticism.” Geerhardus Vos, “Review of Buddhistische Und Neutestamentliche Erzählungen by Georg Faber,” in *The Collected Reviews of Geerhardus Vos* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Romans 5:12 NLT.

¹¹ As outlined in this Introduction and later within this study, Satan is all bad. But this is not a universal perspective. For example, an alternative view is presented in *God’s Devil: The Incredible Story of How Satan’s Rebellion Serves God’s Purposes* by Erwin Lutzer. Erwin W. Lutzer is a Canadian-born evangelical Christian, speaker, radio broadcaster, and author. He served as senior pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago. His thesis is revealed in the title of his book. Satan is an integral cog in an everlasting, eternal victory over evil as the Kingdom of Heaven reigns at the culmination of this fallen world. Satan is presented as God’s Devil playing a role in God’s overall plan and purpose for our lives:

God uses our conflict with Satan to develop character. These struggles give us the opportunity to have our faith tested. Our spiritual war is a classroom where we can learn about the deceitfulness of sin and the chastisement of God—along with His grace and power. God could’ve banished Satan to another planet or cast him immediately into the lake of fire. But he chose to use the devil, to give him a role to play in the divine drama. God knows that we must fight before we can celebrate. We must learn before we are approved. God permits Satan’s temporary reign, the Puritans used to say, “to increase the saints eternal joy.”

While Lutzer offers a unique perspective, it presupposes that the ends not only justify, but sanction as beneficial the means. We are all familiar with the verse from Romans, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28 NIV). Applying

consequence of sin, but it is also a demonstration of God's love and, coupled with the resurrection, has become the galvanizing symbol of God's gift of grace.

Having raised a son, one truth that I still struggle to grasp is that God was pleased to sacrifice Jesus.¹² Because without the cross, there is no visceral display of how deeply we are loved by God. In the Hebrew Bible, there are multiple references to God's *hesed*—a Hebrew word sometimes translated as God's loving kindness or steadfast love. In the Psalms, a voice says: "I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord forever" (Psalm 89:1). Worshipers are implored to give thanks to the Lord whose steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 106:1; 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43).¹³

Before "let there be light," there was "let them know love." This ultimate act of agape love¹⁴ is the centerpiece of human history and its absolute beginning. As the prophet Isaiah said, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him."¹⁵ The plan was that for him to give himself as an offering for sin so that he'd see life come from it—"life, life, and more life."¹⁶ At the Last Supper, Jesus quoted Isaiah 53 to refer to himself. Jesus said, "For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment."¹⁷ The quote, "he was numbered with the transgressors," is from Isaiah 53:12. Jesus appears to be saying to his disciples, "I am the 'he' Isaiah said will be crushed—I

this verse to the serpent's work in Genesis, and the acts of Judas to hand Jesus over to his executioners, we end up with the Cross—the good that God made from bad. But Lutzer takes it a step further and suggests that the bad that God turned to good is actually good in and of itself (because it allowed God to turn it into good). This concept is not presented in Scripture.

¹² Isaiah 53:10 says the Lord was "pleased" to crush Jesus with suffering. NASB.

¹³ Psalm 136 has 26 verses and each one affirms that God's love endures forever.

¹⁴ John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." ESV.

¹⁵ Isaiah 53:10 ESV.

¹⁶ Isaiah 53:10 The Message Bible.

¹⁷ Luke 22:37 ESV.

am the ‘servant’ of Isaiah 53 that will ‘make many to be accounted righteous,’ and who will ‘bear their iniquities.’”¹⁸

The idea that the cross was God’s plan all along can be traced to several New Testament passages.¹⁹ The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”²⁰ John’s Gospel says that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.”²¹

While recognizing the centrality of God’s love and the accompanying message of hope, this study will also address the reality of sin and Satan. To this end, I will share my own battle with Satan and the redeeming power of God that allowed me to return to a life of worship. So, I begin with my personal story that begs for an attentive ear to the Biblical teachings on the reality of Satan and how Satan operates. We then turn to the Biblical lessons about sin and Satan with a particular focus on Genesis to cover the origin of sin and how God responds to it.

Next, this thesis will explore the concept of “entropy” in the natural world—the tendency toward disorder—and how it is mirrored in the spiritual world. Analysis will be done on whether sin is derived from the fact that evil exists, or whether there is an actual supernatural being that tempts us to commit sin. The conclusion here is that there is a singular being—call it the Evil One, the Devil, Satan, or whatever name one may place on it—that wants to separate us from God. Finally, we will conclude with the glorious end of sin and Kingdom rest from its toils.

¹⁸ Isaiah 53:11-13 ESV.

¹⁹ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 25 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 2005), <https://www.olivetree.com/>. In commenting on Isaiah 53:12, Watts writes, “The [New Testament] repeatedly suggests that the entire Christ event was part of God’s plan from the beginning.”

²⁰ Mark 10:45 NRSV.

²¹ John 3:16 NRSV.

What we learn is that there is victory over every evil and the Evil One itself. And we can take part in this victory daily.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Prior to beginning this study, it is important to explain the method used and how this study differs from others. I have seen a number of excellent works on the subject of Satan and the methods Satan employs. But none I have seen ground their conclusions on personal experience with Satan. Unfortunately, I have that perspective. Having lived the hell that Satan can put us through, I share how Scripture presents the true reality of Satan and how Satan can subtly work in our lives.

As one example of a study that takes a different approach, I appreciated the book, *The Strategy of Satan* by William Wiersbe.²² Wiersbe details four titles for Satan: the deceiver, the destroyer, the ruler, and the accuser, devoting a chapter for each. Wiersbe breaks down each of these names by identifying how they portray Satan. First, he identifies Satan's target, then his weapon of choice, the purpose for this endeavor, and finally the way we can defend against Satan by allowing a characteristic of God to flow through us. But what distinguishes the present work from that of Wiersbe is that this work offers a first-person account to provide explanations about how Satan can infect our lives.

Another work that illustrates the unique methodology of this study is *Throw the First Punch* by Beth Guckenberger.²³ Like the present work, Guckenberger shares a very personal story of her encounter with a dark figure during a mission trip to Mexico. She called out Jesus' name, and the figure got on all fours, appeared hurt, and scurried off after her display of faith. This opened Guckenberger's eyes to spiritual warfare. Guckenberger provides a great guide to

²² William Wiersbe, *The Strategy of Satan: How to Detect and Defeat Him* (Illinois: Tyndale House, 1979).

²³ Beth Guckenberger, *Throw the First Punch* (Colorado: David C. Cook, 2022).

Satan's tactics but seldom explains from personal experience exactly how Satan's tactics feel from the inside, and how Satan's deception can feel like a better truth.

So, the distinct methodology here is my persistent reliance upon that time in my life where I was at my lowest and completely under the deception of Satan. A primary source for this work includes drawing on the insights gained from the hours of counseling and also from deep contemplation I have undergone trying to answer the question, "How did this happen? How did Satan turn me from a devout pastor seeking intimacy with God to someone who lived sin without hesitation."

Over the years since those 'dark days' (as my wife refers to them), I have had unique insights into how I felt then versus now. As just one example, I can vividly remember how Satan had me believing that generously showering people with kindness was futile unless there was some tangible result in my ministry. I was led to believe that, as ministers of the Gospel, we had a finite capacity for kindness, and it should not be spent frivolously. I remember this feeling vividly, and it was Satan who taught me this lie. It had devastating results on me and my ministry. The truth is that a deep relationship with Jesus creates a fountainhead of joy and kindness that does not diminish as we treat others with extravagant kindness and generosity, rather it multiplies. I have learned this and other lessons which have informed my perspective on the topic. These lessons are a cornerstone of my methodology and approach to this study. I am using personal experience to explain how Satan works.

I am also using Scripture as a primary source. So, to be clear, I am not using personal experience to inform the meaning of Scripture. My methodology, when going through Biblical texts, is to let the text speak for itself with the aid of scholarly resources, such as concordances, lexicons, and commentaries to discuss literary and historical contexts. My personal experience

comes to bear only after determining the meaning of Scripture. Having said that, some explanation is required concerning the methodology of arriving at this meaning.

As referenced above, the methodology used in this study for determining textual meaning starts with accepting the text as it is (without, for example, introducing the idea that this or that part of the Bible is not actually authentic or part of “Scripture”). Take note that taking the text for what it is does not mean taking Scriptural literally in every situation. That is not the method used in this study. Taking a passage literally can lead to a meaning that has nothing to do with the lesson Scripture is intending to teach. Believing the Bible is 100% accurate is not equivalent to taking it literally. Jesus said that “anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”²⁴ Taken “literally,” Jesus is making a commandment about how people can and cannot enter a sheep pen. But of course, that is not what Jesus is talking about at all. He is referring to Israel’s leaders and others who lead his followers astray.²⁵

Thus, my approach to let the Scriptural text speak for itself means an honest effort to avoid rigid literalism and subjective bias to arrive at a reasoned meaning (again, with the help of resources such as concordances, lexicons, and commentaries). In discussing the Biblical texts in this thesis, I have endeavored to apply the approach offered by Canadian theologian and professor of theology, J. I. Packer, which is to approach each Scripture with “an advance

²⁴ John 10:1 NIV.

²⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1999), <https://www.olivetree.com/>. Beasley-Murray writes concerning this passage, “Israel’s leaders are condemned for neglecting the sheep.”

commitment to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach.”²⁶

²⁶ James I. Packer, “Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority,” *Themelios* 1 (1975), 11. Packer writes on inerrancy in more detail as follows:

Inerrancy is a word that has only been in common use since the last century, though the idea itself goes back through seventeenth-century orthodoxy, the Reformers, and the Schoolmen, to the Fathers and, behind them, to our Lord’s own statements, ‘the Scripture cannot be broken’, ‘thy word is truth’ (Jn. 10:35; 17:17) Logically, its function has been to express a double commitment: first, an advance commitment to receive as truth from God all that Scripture is found on inspection actually to teach; second, a methodological commitment to interpret Scripture according to the principle of harmony . . . It thus represented not so much a lapse into rationalism as a bulwark against rationalism—namely, that kind of rationalism which throws overboard the principle of harmony. It thus expressed also, not an irreligious preoccupation with scientific accuracy, as some have suggested, but an attitude of reverence for the sacred text which some were irreverently expounding as if it were in places self-contradictory and false.

Chapter 2: My Personal Story

Later on, we will explore in detail the origin of sin and the Fall recorded in Genesis. I wish I could talk about these subjects and engage the varying views without having known the reality of Satan from personal experience. I wish that my writing this was simply the fact that, in over 50 years of church attendance, I have never heard a message devoted to this topic.

There was a time that I believed that Satan and evil forces were essentially academic—something that resided in the pages of Scripture and experienced by people long past. I certainly believed in sin, but an actual Satan that delighted in my doing it, not really. I would talk about it, even preach about it, but when it came right down to it, I did not truly believe it. It is said that the devil's greatest deception is to have us believe that he does not exist. That is exactly where I was—completely vulnerable to attack.

I was deep in the throes of raising children, sustaining a marriage, having a law practice, and doing vocational ministry all at the same time. Add to that living in the fast-paced Silicon Valley where an active social calendar is unavoidable. The particular ministry in which I was involved at that time had numerous wonderful people—but an inordinate percentage of people in need, people hurting, and people struggling. The church was also in the midst of a transformation. I came to the church as its worship pastor when it was basically at rock bottom. We started church services often with a dozen or fewer people in attendance, hoping that a few more people might fill out the pews in the following minutes.

I was part of the team to turn things around in an effort to make a bigger impact in the community. A lot of people left with the changes we were making, but some stayed. It was exciting but also exhausting. We developed a new way to do musical ministry and fresh ideas from the pulpit. We remodeled much of the sanctuary, installed an elaborate lighting system, and

added high-end sound equipment. I led those aspects of the restructuring, pouring in countless hours in addition to actual ministry work.

My particular focus was to lead the worship team and do my best to minister to them. All eyes were on me leading worship Sunday mornings and expectations were high. Things were going well. Attendance swelled like a flood in just two years. At the high-water mark, we had over 400 people attend on Easter Sunday. This was more than ten times the attendance from when the senior pastor started making changes. We went to two weekly services. Of course, this only added to the burden of my ministry.

But I felt confident. I was seminary educated. In addition, I had a law degree and a wealth of worldly experience. I could handle this. But this piece of wisdom I did not have: “God regularly uses people who are educated, trained, and experienced to move his kingdom forward, [but] those whose confidence is in their abilities and experience can easily forget their need for Christ in the everyday life of ministry.”²⁷

My first mistake was that I leaned on my experience and confidence instead of Christ. That, combined with my disdain for accepting the reality of Satan, made me vulnerable to attack. And that is what the devil started doing. One thing I have learned to expect on this side of heaven is that if God is moving in your ministry, so is Satan.²⁸ If people are experiencing the life-changing power of the Gospel, you have the devil’s attention. A life-changing, impactful ministry is taking territory away from Satan that *will* be defended.

²⁷Barbara Bancroft, *Running on Empty: A Gospel for Women in Ministry* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014), 4.

²⁸This is not to say that the lack of church growth or other visible impacts regularly associated with ministry success mean God is absent. My observation from over 20 years in ministry is that we cannot always see the ways in which a ministry is making an impact in people’s lives. Sometimes we learn years later how impactful someone’s efforts were in ministry. My point here is only to say that when a ministry is clearly growing and people are being positively impacted by it, Satan will want to stop it.

So, the devil started a subtle work in me. At the time all of this was going on, I was coming to grips with my limitations as well as focusing on the fact that I was getting older. Some would say that what I experienced was a midlife crisis, and if such a thing exists, they may have been right, and that was one more thing I was struggling with at the time. Satan used all of that to systematically take away from me everything that I cherished. Starting with the least significant, he convinced me that I was no longer a good athlete, and I had no worth as a competitor in sports. This may seem insignificant but much of my self-worth, like many who grew up in sports, was integrally tied to athletic ability. In high school, I excelled in track and field and reached ninth in the nation in my event. When I would go to a track meet, there was an unspoken veneration for this kind of athletic threat. I also played ice hockey and have always noticed a strong correlation between the most gifted players and guys people want to hang out with. My perception was that if someone is a good athlete, people seem to listen to them. So, when my athleticism started to go away, Satan was fast at work to attack my self-worth.

Next, Satan had me believe that my value as a worship leader was in my musical abilities, which were extremely limited compared to other people in my position—again attacking my worth. The truth was that I had a lot to offer in ministry without being a guitar genius or vocally spectacular. Looking back, I remember times that my musical shortcomings actually helped me in ministry. Because I was less focused on impressing the congregation with my guitar or vocals—something I could never do—I tried to lead a music team with worshipful hearts and usher the congregation into an experience with God by leading them with my heart not my musical skill. Looking back, I realize that it was Satan who convinced me that my musical shortcomings made me worthless, and that I actually had a lot to offer as a worship leader when I

stood in front of the congregation as a lead worshiper, not a lead musician. But instead, I ended up stepping down from ministry altogether as I spiraled into Satan's grip further and further.

Next, Satan impressed upon me that my children, who had reached high school age, were essentially emancipated and not in need of fathering anymore—so I had little worth as a parent. I ended up retreating into my lawyer job and becoming basically absent from the lives of my kids. My children have told me since that this time was extremely hard for them, and they felt that their mother was the only parent who was engaged in their lives.

But Satan did far worse than all this. The devil turned my eyes against the most amazing human being I have ever met—a beautiful, loyal, loving, caring, God-fearing wife—and made her unattractive to me. I became worthless as a husband. A husband is exhorted to love God and love his wife and treat her with respect and care. One of my most painful memories of this time in my life is how deeply my wife wanted to be loved and the fact that I gave her none. She was starving for the devoted love of a faithful husband. She could not conceive of life with anyone but me, and she loved me more than any one person could love another human being even in the face of constant rejection. Some would say it was pitiful, and she should have just left me. But they know nothing of a love that deep—a love that cries itself to sleep through prayer, that will not turn away from the vows of marriage. Only Satan could convince me that a woman this amazing was someone to be dissatisfied with. And Satan did just that, which cut deeply into my wife's soul.

But the scheme could not be complete until Satan cut me off from the only thing that could have saved me. I was an ardent and passionate lover of Scripture and worship. The devil took that too, because those things are life-sustaining and the effective means to defend against Satan's attack. But all of my worship and Bible study became solely about what I could use in a

sermon, a Bible-study lesson, or something to say during worship in front of the church. I came to the point where I could not read a passage in the Bible without thinking, “Oh, this would fit so well with this song as an introduction to worship,” or, “what a great lesson this would make here.” Nothing I did in the way of worship or self-study moved my heart—it was purely preparation for ministry. Thus, Satan claimed the last territory of my soul, the very means to commune with the Divine, and made me worthless as a worshiper.

So when the devil was done with me, I was: (i) Worthless as an athlete, washed up; (ii) Worthless as a worship leader, a hack on stage; (iii) Worthless as a father, no longer relevant to my kids; (iv) Worthless as a husband, giving nothing to a wife who gave everything; and (v) Worthless as a worshiper, none of God’s word or communion impacting me whatsoever. Satan took away, with my active participation, everything I loved. At this time, I had fully allowed Satan to ruin my life. I was totally out of ministry, divorced from my wife, and had essentially no contact with her or my kids. I found worth only in things of this world. I was completely disconnected from Jesus.

However, God worked a miracle in the depth of my worthless life that is too amazing not to share. While playing in an ice hockey game, a 90-mile-an-hour slap shot ramped off of a stick five feet in front of me and hit me square in the throat. There was no blood and no visible sign of injury. But within three minutes, I knew something was very wrong. As each minute passed, it became more difficult to breathe. My throat was swelling inside and closing off my windpipe.

I quickly left the game and immediately went to the locker room, grabbing an ice rink employee to come in with me while I changed out of my gear in case my windpipe closed and I passed out. The entire time, the employee was frantically talking on his walkie talkie trying to get an ambulance on the way. When I was dressed, I headed for the door.

In a move that the doctors later said saved my life, I physically pushed past the ice rink employee who was insisting that I wait for the ambulance. I did not have that much time. I drove myself to the nearest hospital that was 10 miles away. Ironically, the clergy parking spot at the ER was open so I took it. By this time, things were getting foggy. Breathing was very labored, and I could barely speak. Bones were broken in the front of my neck and my windpipe was almost fully closed. The emergency room was packed, but like a victim of multiple gunshot wounds, I was put on an operating table within minutes of my arrival with three doctors and two nurses in the room.

This is where the miracle begins. With my last breath before I was put under anesthesia, the nurse demanded a contact phone number for her to call to notify someone about what had happened. Without hesitation, I scribbled a number. With my last words before going under, I pointed to the number and said, “My wife.” It is beyond this short summary to explain how miraculous it was that I did that. But even more miraculous is what happened next.

The last thing I remember from the ICU operating table before being intubated, put on a breathing apparatus, and induced into a coma for eight days (so the swelling would subside) is the nurse telling my “wife” what was happening. Now mind you, any right-minded person in her position would have hung up the phone on her ex-husband. She would have been within her rights to actually delight in doing so. By every worldly standard, my wife should have said to herself, “This man left us, abandoned me, hurt me and everyone else that loved him. No! John can take care of himself. He made his bed, now he needs to lie in it. I have moved on. I won’t allow myself to be hurt anymore.”

But my wife cannot be measured by worldly standards. She was in the car driving to the hospital within sixty seconds, questioning what she was doing all the way there, but driving still.

Her home for the next eight days would be a hard plastic chair sitting by my comatose body—the person that cast her aside; the person she no longer knew.



Figure 1. Picture of Me in the ICU bed.

Pictured in Figure 1 is the ICU bed I laid in for eight days. Every one of those days, my wife sat in that chair by my side for 18 hours. Sometimes, I would become agitated, and the nurses had to put straps on my arms to keep me from yanking out my intravenous line and breathing tubes. But with the most loving and kind heart, my wife would calm my body and spirit by just laying her hand on me. The drugs had me comatose from the outside, but my brain was active. The doctors said that the drugs were designed to simulate a regular daily cycle of

eight hours of sleep and 16 hours of awareness. So, as I lay there unable to communicate, and ostensibly unconscious, I was actually in a world that was very real.

This is when the true miracle happened. God used those eight days when I was mentally alert but unconscious to sit by my side. It was as if Jesus saw me lying in a ditch, reached down, and pulled me out. And then for eight days he nursed me back to spiritual health. He said to me, “John, you are my child. You may not feel like it right now, but I never abandoned you. I saw your pain and emptiness. I tried time and time again to get your attention, but you kept believing the Deceiver. I came for you. I am here now. I forgive you.”

The person that woke up from the coma was not the same person that went under. I went into the coma an abandoner, a sinner, a betrayer—and worst of all, I was content with all of it. I was actually content with my new life, divorced from everything I had loved for over 30 years. But I woke up a completely different person.

On day eight, the time came to revive me. They called my wife, and she wanted no part of it. Her service was done. She had stayed by my side day after day. She talked to the nurses and doctors. She consoled me when I needed it. But my wife wanted no part of the awake John, the person that turned his back on God and everything he loved, most painfully her. So, she headed back to work that day. But God reached down to my wife and intervened. It was almost rude. When the freeway exit for her office came up, she drove right by it and continued to the hospital.

As fate would have it, she walked into the ICU right when they were reviving me and removing the tubes from my throat and chest. (When consciousness is regained, the body reacts severely against a tube down the throat. It is a violent awakening.) As soon as the tubes were out, tears filled my eyes, and I began to scream at the top of my lungs. “I’m sorry Sandi! I’m sorry

“Sandi!” Over and over, I said this, and nothing the nurses or doctors could do would stop me. A nurse had seen my wife enter the ICU and grabbed her arm. The ICU is a quiet place filled with only sounds of medical equipment beeping and clicking. “This has to stop! Go in there and stop it,” said the nurse. The medical staff knew by this time that no one but my wife could console me when I became agitated—not the nurses, not my visiting parents, not drugs—only my wife.

My wife entered the room and I lunged to the floor in agony. I prostrated myself at my wife’s feet still apologizing and telling her how much I loved her. This was not okay with the medical team, to say the least. I was physically lifted back into my hospital bed. Everyone was baffled by this. The medical team had never seen something quite like it. What was going on?

During those eight days, God had opened my eyes. My experience between the time I went into the coma and came out of it was no less than light from heaven flashing all around me and the scales falling from my eyes. I could see again.

The things Satan had convinced me were so valuable became worthless the instant I woke up. I wanted nothing to do with any of those things Satan had introduced me to. I hated—detested the person I was when I walked into the ER. I woke up only with a hunger for the gifts God gave me—worship, a deep relationship with Jesus, the wife of my youth (we were married at 20), and my family. The effects of both Jesus and my wife at my side for eight days were irresistible and irreversible. They were ministering to a lost and hurting soul, a man who was broken and had all but totally given in to Satan’s control. There is no question that God was working on me 24 hours per day for eight days.

God literally changed my heart while I was in a coma to where Satan had no home there anymore. God evicted the devil from my heart, and I woke up a new person. I instantly became the husband my wife always wanted, and an active, engaged father that my kids needed, and I

hungered for Scripture, worship, and prayer. My spiritual counselor—a former seminary professor of mine who stepped in to counsel my wife and I after all this—said I was like a dry sponge because Satan had kept me from God. I soaked up everything Satan took from me.

I still struggle with sin like everyone else, but I have a new perspective having been to the abyss and returned. I have played poker with the devil and know his bluffs all too well. Satan is cunning beyond our wildest imaginations. The Evil One will have us doing something destructive while thinking we are doing the right thing.

If this study does nothing else, I pray that it makes you aware of the reality of the Evil One who will delight in your failure. And I pray that this would create in you a desire to be on guard against his attacks.

Chapter 3: Perfect God—Imperfect Universe

It was Christmas 2004 and evening was approaching. My children were 8 and 5 years old. The house was filled with the aroma of Christmas dinner while the kids were playing with their new toys. We all laughed as we watched Will Ferrell's masterful performance in the movie *Elf*. Life was good—for us. Little did we know that during those very moments, a 9.1 earthquake was erupting off the Indonesian coast triggering a series of tsunamis that would ravage the nearby coastline. While millions were enjoying their Christmas dinners, others were fighting for their lives. Sonali Deraniyagala detailed the tragic event:

All at once I saw brown water . . . as far as I could see. My head was above the water now. Still, I was being swept along at such a speed. There was nothing I could hold. I flung about. There are trees swirling around me. What *is* this about? I was with Vik, in our room. He wants to wear his new England cricket shirt, we are driving back to Colombo soon . . . This has to be a dream, I thought. I tasted salt. Water battered my face, it went up my nose, it burned my brain . . .

I can't let myself die here in whatever this is. My boys. A child was floating towards me. A boy. His head was above the water, he was screaming. Daddy, Daddy . . . From a distance, I thought this boy was Malli. I tried to reach him. The water slammed into my face and pushed me back, but I managed to get nearer to the boy. Come to Mummy, I said out loud. Then I saw his face up close. He wasn't Mal. The next instant I was knocked sideways, and the boy was gone.²⁹

The wave of destruction carried Sonali two miles until it finally receded. Along the way, she lost her husband, her two children, her parents, and her best friend. The juxtaposition of our peaceful Christmas dinner and Sonali's tragedy happening simultaneously bears witness to a nature that can be both kind and evil. Sonali experienced natural evil, and the ocean, as it often can be, was the instrument of this evil.

²⁹ Sonali Deraniyagala, *Wave: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 11-12.

There are biblical narratives that present the sea as a place of disorder, chaos and even separation from God. As Jonah said, “You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me . . . I am driven away from your sight.”³⁰

In Genesis, the sea is used to represent the broader chaos universally present. Thus, it is prudent to see what God does with that chaos. Genesis presents a world of chaos, but at the same time God is poised to bring to it magnificent order. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be . . .’”³¹ It is with these three words that God brings order to both earth and sky. Light, sky, waters, land, vegetation, luminaries, animals, and humankind listen to God’s voice.

Figure 2 below presents the timeline of the Genesis account.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| the earth was . . . | the Spirit of God was . . . | Then God said, “Let there be...” | |
| formless desolate empty dark | hovering | Day 1 light | Day 4 luminaries |
| | | Day 2 sky | Day 5 birds and fish |
| | | Day 3 land/vegetation | Day 6 animals and humankind |
| | | Day 7 | |
| | | Sabbath ³² | |

Figure 2. Timeline of the Genesis 1 Creation Story.

³⁰ Jonah 2:3-4 NRSV.

³¹ Genesis 1:1-2 NASB.

³² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1987), <https://www.olivetree.com/>. Wenham writes concerning Genesis 1 that the structure presented as days shows the following:

[T]here is . . . a correspondence in the contents of the days. Day 3 deals with the creation of the land and plants, while day 6 deals with the animals that live on the land and man, and God permits them to eat the plants. Similar correspondences link days 1 and 4: day 1 mentions the creation of light, day 4 the creation of the light-producing bodies. Day 2 discusses the creation of the sky, day 5 the birds of heaven.

For our study, we focus upon the state of the earth as formless, desolate, and empty. The Hebrew words used are תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ, transliterated: “tohu wabohu.” The question presented by this phrase is: does *tohu wabohu* simply mean emptiness and chaos, or does it also include a component of evil? To answer this, we must investigate the purpose of the text.

Before jumping into the text, it is prudent to pause on the word “evil.” A simple definition of evil is: “[The] absence of good; that which opposes, resists or undermines the good.”³³ It is important to understand that “the Christian tradition differentiates evil that is connected with the rebellion or fall of moral creatures (humans and angelic beings) from ‘natural’ evils, that is, suffering-producing events that occur through the outworking of the laws of the physical world.”³⁴ While this chapter opened with an example of natural evil to introduce the subject, the true focus of this study is on former concept of evil—the fall of moral creatures—which is referred to in this study as evil or sin (again, sin is a broader concept than simply moral failure as explained in the previous chapter). Still, there is some overlap of natural evil and sin in Genesis that cannot be avoided. Thus, when we explore the concept of entropy (tendency toward disorder), we will see that this occurs both in natural and human creatures. But again, the focus will be on the spiritual chaos created by Satan and the sin that flows out of it. So, with this framework in mind, we turn to the Genesis account and what it might tell us about evil.

We enter the scene in Genesis 1:2 with God’s hovering over creation in its primordial state. Thus, there is immediately a juxtaposition between the world without God’s introduced order (chaos) and what it will become when God’s hovering spirit begins to bring order (beauty). This is the primary purpose of the text—a halleluiah chorus about God’s provision. Genesis is a

³³ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 37.

³⁴ Grenz and Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, 37.

glorious display of how God took his disordered creation and introduced into it love and divine order resulting in life.

“Ex nihilo” refers to the principle that God created everything from nothing. This is well documented in Scripture *outside* of Genesis 1.³⁵ If we let these other Scriptures proclaim God’s creative activity, we can put Genesis 1 in its proper place of explaining how God brought order and beauty to his existing creation rather than how he created it in the first place.

To this point, there is in Genesis an implied, and sometimes explicit, contrast between chaos and God’s divine work. Thus, instead of seeing the text as good versus evil, it can also be viewed as order versus chaos. Further, according to Professor Lincoln Galloway, “The notion of ‘darkness’ being interpreted as synonymous with ‘evil’ is very problematic theology, and has led to such things as labeling Africa as the ‘dark continent’ and ascribing to it things that are evil and demonic. Christian missionaries out of Europe ascribed ‘light’ to themselves, as the ‘enlightened’ ones.”³⁶ The desolate emptiness and watery deep,³⁷ however, can denote the presence of evil.³⁸ This watery depth, sometimes translated abyss,³⁹ is where the evil one is said

³⁵ “The Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place...” (Prov. 3:19 NIV). “God . . . calls into being things that were not” (Rom. 4:17 NIV). “You made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.” (Acts 4:24 NIV). “The universe was formed at God’s command . . .” (Heb. 11:3 NIV). “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” (Col. 1:16 NIV).

³⁶ Lincoln Galloway, Claremont School of Theology Professor, March 23, 2024 comments to this thesis.

³⁷ In Genesis 1:2 darkness is said have covered the “deep” (ESV) or “watery deep” (NET).

³⁸ Further evidence of the notion of evil being part of Genesis 1:2 (“and darkness was over the surface of the deep”) is the reference to sea. There is an “ancient Israelite tradition of the opposition of Yahweh and the sea.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52c (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1998), <https://www.olivetree.com/>. Aune further writes that this is seen “in a variety of ways in the OT and early Judaism,” such as the following: “(1) Yahweh establishes a border or sets a guard on the sea (Jer 5:22; Job 7:12). (2) Yahweh rebukes or is angry with the waters (Isa 1:2; Nah 1:4; Hab 3:8; Pss 18:6; 29:3; 1 Enoch 101:7). (3) Yahweh dries up the waters (Isa 1:2; 19:5; Jer 1:38; 51:36; Ezek 30:12; Nah 1:4; Ps 18:16; Job 12:15; Sib. Or. 5.447; 1 Enoch 101:7).”

³⁹ For example, the New American Bible Revised Edition translates Genesis 1:2 as, “The earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters.” (NABRE).

to reside (Luke 8:31; Rev 17:8).⁴⁰ How does one deal with the assumption that God created a universe with evil in it, or at least the capability of its coming about and being present in the world? In other words, is God responsible, either directly or indirectly, for creating evil? One of the faculty members at Babes-Bolyai University answers the question this way: “Why did God create the world in this way? Because only in a world that in its inner structure has degrees of indeterminacy, a real freedom is possible for human beings.”⁴¹ C.S. Lewis offers a similar view that not even an omnipotent God “could create a society of free souls without at the same time creating a relatively independent and ‘inexorable’ Nature.”⁴²

There is a law of thermodynamics called “entropy” that says everything migrates towards disorder. A perfectly clear glass of water will soon be cloudy and undrinkable. A vibrant leaf withers to dust. “The foundations of the earth . . . will all wear out like a garment.”⁴³ This statement is written in relation to God who remains. The *tohu wobohu* that existed before God went to work was entropy expressed in its fullest. But logically, the eventual end point of entropy is total disorder. The fact that there is not total disorder suggests that God, or some higher being, has interacted somehow to alter entropy. Izak J. van der Walt states, “The implication is that for

⁴⁰ Ronald E. Heine, *In Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 47-48. In this work, Heine translates one of the earliest commentators on the Bible after Jesus, Origen, who says in his *Homilies on Genesis* that the abyss in Genesis 1 is where “the devil and his angels will be,” and “for this reason, therefore, God dissolved the darkness as Scripture says: ‘And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

⁴¹ Grigore-Dinu Mos, “Tohu Wabohu In Genesis 1, 2. Kabbalistic, Patristic And Modern Exegesis,” *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 62, no. 2 (Dec. 2017): 16, <https://doi.org/10.24193/subto.2017.2.01>.

⁴² C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Sin* (Broadway, New York: HarperCollins Press, 1996), 19.

⁴³ Hebrews 1:10-11 NIV.

anything to exist at all, such as a star, a planet or living organisms, there must be some external driving force that creates order from the primordial disorderly state.”⁴⁴

Herein lies the essence of this entire chapter. From the time God brought order to the world, there has always been evil and a tendency toward it, or “spiritual entropy.” The opening chapter of Genesis of recounting God’s work, on first observation, suggests the opposite “God saw that the light was good” (v.4); “And God saw that it was good” (v.12, 18, 21, 25); “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (v.31), but these verses support the point of this thesis—that God stepped in and interfered with entropy’s path by making things orderly and “good.” So, without God, there would be no hope for an orderly world. But God intervenes not only to overcome physical entropy, but also spiritual entropy. When Adam and Eve sinned, God clothed them.⁴⁵ The remainder of the Bible promises God’s faithfulness to God’s people. Jesus came not to just heal a few people from natural evils, but to heal all of the world from spiritual evils. Jesus did not want people to think of him as a mere physical healer, so he told them to be quiet. This suggests that Jesus had an utmost concern for our spiritual well being.

⁴⁴ Izak J. van der Walt, “Reformed Theology and Natural Science—Conflict or Concurrence?,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 54, no. 2 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v54i2.2556>. Van der Walt further writes as follows:

[R]ecent technological developments have enabled scientists to observe on a scale that was unthinkable just a few years ago. Humankind now has the ability to study the furthest reaches of the known universe as well as to view incredible molecular machines that are driving complex processes in cells, and even to observe subatomic particles in real time. The results of such observations profoundly challenge unguided randomness as the only explanation of reality, and an increasing number of scientists acknowledge the likelihood of an extraneous intelligence having having played (and is still playing) a significant role throughout the history of the universe.

Van der Walt, “Reformed Theology and Natural Science,” 4.

⁴⁵ Genesis 3:21 ESV.

God's care for us also appears in the second verse of Genesis: “ . . . and the Spirit of God was hovering^[46] over the face of the waters.”⁴⁷ In Deuteronomy 32:11, the word is used of an eagle “that hovers over its young” to describe God’s relationship to the assembly of Israel (32:1, 6, 9). Similarly, God rescued the primordial state from its disorder. Genesis describes this restorative work through the divine fiats, “Let there be . . .”

Any question of whether evil was present before the fall is answered by this verse. How else could there be an evil serpent if evil was not already lurking? A contrary view is argued by Charlesworth, who does not identify the serpent as being evil, who writes, “It cannot be said too forcefully or with too much necessary redundancy: The serpent must not be presupposed to symbolize Satan, or evil, in the Eden Story.”⁴⁸ I disagree with Charlesworth and hold to the view that the serpent does represent Satan and the disorder that Satan brings to the world. I see the serpent standing in parallel to *tohu wobohu*. Both are evil. We see this evil at work in the dialogue with Eve.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The Hebrew word “hovering” (נִשְׁׁבָּרָא) in this verse can be translated as cover or protect. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), s.v. “נִשְׁׁבָּרָא.”

⁴⁷ Genesis 1:2 ESV.

⁴⁸ James Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol became Christianized* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 278.

⁴⁹ Genesis 3:1-6 NIV.

A lot can be learned about evil and the deceiving serpent in this exchange. To unpack it all, Figure 3 below is a chart of what God actually said, the serpent's rendition of it, and the couple's response.

| God | Serpent | Eve | Adam |
|--|--|---|--------|
| You may surely eat of every tree of the garden. - Genesis 2:16 | Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden.”? - Genesis 3:1 | We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. - Genesis 3:2 | Silent |
| The tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. - Genesis 2:17 | | God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.” - Genesis 3:3 | Silent |
| For in the day that you eat of [the tree of knowledge] you shall surely die. - Genesis 2:17 | “You will not surely die. - Genesis 3:4 | “Neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ - Genesis 3:3 | Silent |

Figure 3. Selected Statements from the Serpent in Genesis 3 and the Response of Adam and Eve.

The Genesis text describes the serpent as “crafty.” The Hebrew word here can actually have a positive connotation as clever, prudent, or sensible.⁵⁰ The word is used six times in Proverbs with a positive connotation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The BDB*, s.v. “מַרְעֵשׁ.”

⁵¹ “The prudent ignores an insult.” (Prov. 12:16 ESV). “One who is clever conceals knowledge...” (Prov. 12:23 NRSV). “The clever do all things intelligently...” (Prov. 13:16 NRSV). “The clever ... understand where they

God ordered the earth and everything in it to create a temple for the crown jewel of creation—Adam and Eve. The manner in which Genesis records the creation of Eve reveals the intimacy shared between Adam and Eve. God pronounced it is not good that man should be alone. And so, God made “a helper fit for him.” The Hebrew word here, *אֶזֶר* (ezer), literally means support. It is often used to refer to the provision by God. The word does not imply inferiority, but rather a partnership of equals providing mutual support.⁵²

Next, God takes a rib from Adam to fashion his bride. Before the 16th century, it was believed that men had one less rib than women for this reason. But the true point here is that Scripture is introducing the concept of marriage as making two into one. Professor at Claremont Theological Seminary, Lincoln Galloway, makes a poignant statement on this subject: “No matter how sentimental ‘better half’ may sound, each person brings their full selves (the totality of who they are) to the marriage.”

Within this beautiful institution, the vehicle for Eve’s creation—Adam’s rib—is close to his heart and guards his soul. It signifies the “social union” of the couple.⁵³ Matthew Henry offers this explanation for the rib used to form Eve: “Not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm

go...” (Prov. 14:8 NRSV). “...the clever consider their steps.” (Prov. 14:15 NRSV). “The clever see danger...” (Prov. 27:12 NRSV).

⁵² William E. Phipps, “Adam’s Rib: Bone of Contention,” *Theology Today* 33, no. 3 (1976): 271, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004057367603300306>. In exploring the internal evidence for an egalitarian interpretation of the Genesis account of Eve’s creation, Phipps writes as follows:

An examination of the twenty other usages of *ezer* in Hebrew Scriptures displays that it never connotes someone in a servile role. It often refers to a superior person and occasionally is associated with divine assistance. For example, a psalmist proclaims: “Happy is he whose helper (*ezer*) is the God of Jacob.” *Ezer* is joined by *naged*, which means a like counterpart. *Ezer neged* can best be translated “a partner corresponding to him.”

Phipps, *Adam’s Rib*, 271.

⁵³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 1a, q. 92, a.1, Obj.1.

to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”⁵⁴ When Adam is presented with his bride, his reaction is poetic elation:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.⁵⁵

The marriage is now complete. And God says, the two “shall become one flesh.”⁵⁶ They are naked and “were not ashamed.” Literally nothing stood between Adam and Eve, nor between them and God. They shared everything and experienced only joy.

Adam and Eve started as being one with God and each other, free from deception. With surgical precision, the serpent dismantled all of that in a heartbeat. The means employed was deception. The things said were all close to true, but not quite true. Consequently, “The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”⁵⁷

The Garden temple has now been defiled and the first covenant with God broken.⁵⁸ Adam and Eve brought sin upon it, themselves, and all humanity. So, what were they to do? Instinctively, they know they must be “covered.” So, Adam and Eve feebly make a covering for themselves. This is reminiscent of things to come. In Exodus 25, God directs his people to make an “ark of the covenant.” In the ark is the covenant God makes with his people. The ark travels with the people wherever they go. Significantly, there is a cover on the ark, the **תְּרוּמָה**, translated

⁵⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://ccel.org/cCEL/henry/mhc1/mhc1.Gen.iii.html>.

⁵⁵ Genesis 2:23 NIV.

⁵⁶ Genesis 2:24 NIV.

⁵⁷ Genesis 3:7 ESV.

⁵⁸ God deals with his people through covenants. The first is widely regarded as the covenant of creation (not explicitly stated but unmistakably implied). God would provide for Adam and Eve, and they would obey him. But Adam “broke the covenant.” (Hos. 6:6, NET).

mercy seat—or more literally, “atonement lid.”⁵⁹ The covenant resides beneath the atonement lid. The cover is necessary as a mediator between us and the covenants with God that believers continually break.

This is a lot of theology speak that begs for plain language. The concept of atonement in its simplest sense is the quality of being one with something.⁶⁰ After they sinned, Adam and Eve no longer felt a oneness with God, which is evidenced by the fact that they hid from God’s presence.⁶¹ So how could Adam and Eve fix this problem—how could they cover their mistake and be reconciled—regaining that oneness—with God?

What we see is that Adam and Eve mustered up fig leaves and loincloths as atonement covers. Adam and Eve’s feeble coverings demonstrate that humanity’s effort to reverse spiritual entropy are no more successful than our efforts to stop floods, disease, and death. God came to the aid of Adam and Eve, and symbolically all humankind.

“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”⁶² Also, “The Lord God said to the serpent” that Eve will bear offspring and “he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”⁶³ The image here is a repeated striking of the serpent.

This is the promise of a new covenant between God and his people: “I will send you a Savior.” Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the *protoevangelium*, which is Latin for “first gospel.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Rick Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), s.v. “atonement.”

⁶⁰ “Originally the English word ‘atonement’ meant ‘the quality of being at one (with).’” Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), s.v. “atonement,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁶¹ Genesis 3:8 NIV.

⁶² Genesis 3:21 ESV.

⁶³ Genesis 3:15 NLT.

⁶⁴ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “protoevangelium.” According to the contributors to this dictionary, “PROTEVANGELIUM” is a Latin term meaning ‘first gospel,’ and the “refers to the promise of Gen 3:15 that the ‘seed of the woman’ would conquer the ‘seed of the serpent’” and the “concept is applied to Jesus as Messiah (see Rom 16:20; Gal 3:16, 19, 29).” Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. The term, “protoevangelium,” is

Interpreters of the Bible tell us that Genesis 3:15 announces that the seed of Eve will ultimately “crush” sin and Satan.⁶⁵ The New Testament has this same promise: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan.”⁶⁶

also defined in Douglas Mangum’s *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014) as follows: “A term (based on the Greek words for ‘first’ . . . and ‘gospel’ [euangelion]) that refers to the first allusion to the gospel in Gen 3:15, where God promises that Eve’s offspring will prevail over the serpent’s offspring.”

⁶⁵ See, e.g., footnote immediately above.

⁶⁶ Romans 16:20 NIV.

Chapter 4: The Reality of Satan

In this chapter, we will delve deeply into Scripture to explore a very important question of whether Satan could be understood merely as a fictional construct. Are transgressions the result of our being natural (because sin is part of our nature) or the result of a supernatural being? We will look to both the Old and New Testaments below for the answer.

Old Testament References to an Evil Being

In Genesis, we see that doing evil was never in the minds of Adam or Eve—that is until the serpent came along. The story squarely frames our question whether our evil is just a natural occurrence, or whether a supernatural being is actively encouraging us to do it. The idea that there is no Evil One and only evil presents a picture of life where we are essentially walking through a mine field. If we are careful, we can avoid pitfalls. For much of my life before my massive downfall, this is how I viewed things—have discipline to stay away from wrong behavior—like avoiding poison oak or snakes on a hike. I viewed life as focusing on being the best version of myself and trying to worship God.

But if there is truly a war being waged for our hearts, we ought to pay attention to who wants to take them. When I conceived of writing on this topic, I worried that it might lack practical application—knowledge for knowledge’s sake. So, I asked my daughter why it matters to know that Satan exists. Her answer was brilliant: “Dad, if I know when I wake up, when I walk out my front door, every time I interact with others, that Satan is actively trying to wage a war for my and others’ hearts and get us to fall into sin, I have to be prepared. I have to face every day differently.” As my own story shows, these words are painfully true. And as we will see in exploring texts from the Old and New Testament, Scripture warns us to be concerned with evil and also the Evil One.

Sin or Satan

At a minimum, it seems that Genesis presents a being that intervenes between humans and God. This is not to say that we should take Genesis so literally that an actual serpent formulated actual words and spoke to the first actual woman. This is possible but not required for the conclusion above. The text could also present a symbolic representation of an actual Satan employing the imagery of the serpent.

But possibly contrasting with this view is God's words to Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."⁶⁷ In that dialogue, God does not say Satan or the devil is crouching at your door; he says "sin" is lying in wait. Further, some scholars argue that the Old Testament does not present an Evil One at all. As Ryan Stokes puts it: "Satan as he appears in the book of Revelation is a prince of evil, the main adversary of God and Christ in the end time. It may come as a surprise to Christian readers that no such figure is known in the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]."⁶⁸ But I find that the symbolism of the serpent points to an Evil One rather than simply the existence of evil. Later passages in the Old Testament seem to support this conclusion.

The Day of Atonement

The next Scripture that may have a reference to an evil being is Leviticus 16:8 (the scapegoat). This Scripture was a monumental passage for Israelites because it set forth God's commandments for forgiveness of their sins—the "Day of Atonement," still celebrated by Jews

⁶⁷ Genesis 4:7 NIV.

⁶⁸ Ryan E. Stokes, *The Satan: How God's Executioner Became the Enemy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), xi. Louis Jonker argues that "belief in a personified evil power only developed from the second century BCE onward." Louis C. Jonker, "The Development of a Satan Figure as Socio-Theological Diagnostic Strategy from the late Persian Imperial Era to Early Christianity," *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 2 (2017): 354.

today as Yom Kippur. On this day, the high priest did an important ritual to “atone” for the sins of the entire nation. The word translated from Hebrew as atone (כִּפּוּר - kāpar) literally means “to cover;” the concept “is envisioned as covering over sin and thus cleaning it up.”⁶⁹ Because the source of the ritual is the sin of the people, part of it deals with an evil being. To see and understand this reference, we need to understand certain aspects of ancient Israel’s history including its enslavement, the Temple of Israel, the remnant of the faithful, and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

Scripture presents two groups of people: Jews and Gentiles.⁷⁰ Jews are the group referred to as Israel, to which the Old Testament revelation was given (and this group included outsiders who joined with them).⁷¹ For hundreds of years, Israel was enslaved in Egypt. But God delivered them from bondage by sending plagues upon Egypt and drowning its army in the Red Sea after parting it for Israel to pass. Israel was then free but became a nation without a home or overseeing government. Worse, there was no “Temple” for the people to meet their God.

⁶⁹ Adriani Milli Rodrigues, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), s.v. “atonement,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., Acts 14:1, 5; 19:10, 17; 1 Cor. 1:22–24. See also, Douglas S. Huffman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), s.v. “Gentile,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁷¹ Isaiah 56:6-7 confirms salvation for all those who seek the Lord:

And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
 to minister to him,
 to love the name of the Lord,
 and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
 and who hold fast to my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain
 and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
 will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
 a house of prayer for all nations.

NIV.

Temple

A Temple simply refers to a “sacred, demarcated place.”⁷² The Temple is a key concept that permeates the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God is everywhere, but for Jews, the Temple was where his presence was truly seen and felt. Temples were commonplace in the ancient world. It was considered “the home of a deity and thus the point of contact between that deity and the mundane world of [humans].”⁷³ The purpose of cult temples was “to coax the deity into positive action on behalf of the community.”⁷⁴

For Jews, however, the Temple was much more. Like its cultic counterparts, the Temple was also the place where God dwelled.⁷⁵ But Jews entered the Temple not simply to petition God’s favor, the Temple was “the focal point of Israel’s worship.”⁷⁶ It was a place for actual communion with the divine—it was sacred space.⁷⁷ As sacred space and the place of God’s presence, evil could not dwell there—the Temple was always to remain pure and holy.⁷⁸

⁷² David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), s.v. “temple,” <https://www.logos.com/>.

⁷³ William A. Ward, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “temple.”

⁷⁴ Ward, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “temple.”

⁷⁵ Matthew 23:21 ESV; John 2:16 ESV. But note that God’s dwelling in the Jewish Temple was somewhat figurative because God resides in God’s heavenly Temple. (Psalm 11:4 ESV). God does not dwell in “houses made by human hands” (Acts 7:33-50 NIV).

⁷⁶ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “temple, Jerusalem.”

⁷⁷ Doug Mangum, “Ezekiel’s Eye for Detail,” in *Study Like a Pro: Explore Difficult Passages from Every Book of the Bible*, eds. John D. Barry and Rebecca Van Noord (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), <https://www.logos.com/>. Mangum notes that the main idea of the rebuilding of the temple (in Ezekiel 40-48) was protecting the purity of sacred, holy space.

⁷⁸ God’s eyes are “too pure to look upon evil.” (Habakkuk 1:13 NIV).

The Remnant

Scripture repeatedly shows that, no matter how bad things become in the world, God will always preserve a group of people loyal to him. At one time, it was only Noah and his family—the sole remnant. But by God’s provision, that small remnant grew into the nation of Israel. The Bible does not record the nation coming from anyone else. Regardless of what you may believe about the historicity of the flood and whether it was a worldwide or localized event, the text has a superior point: God remains faithful and always preserves a remnant. No matter the spiritual decline of God’s people, this remnant was hope for a continuous thread of those faithful to God. This remnant, which is alive in the Church⁷⁹ today, will eventually enter into eternal rest with God as the prophet Zephaniah foretold. The prophet Zephaniah declared judgment against Jerusalem and promised, that after God has taken action, the remnant of Israel shall take refuge in the name of the Lord, find pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.⁸⁰

Out of the tragedy of the flood came the glory of God’s provision—the remnant who pursued God and grew into the nation of Israel. And to meet with them, God told Israel to construct the Tabernacle to engage with the Lord. In an effort to prevent defilement of this sacred space, God also established a number of rituals to keep it and the people of Israel holy. It is one of these key rituals that is found in Leviticus 16 describing the Day of Atonement.

⁷⁹ The capital “C” Church is used to refer to all those who have salvation. I understand this to encompass those who have placed their faith in Jesus (e.g., John 3:15, Mark 16:16). Whether others also have salvation is a matter I leave to God, and it may very well be that God grants salvation in ways I do not foresee or understand.

⁸⁰ Zephaniah 3:13 NASB. The rest promised by Zephaniah in this verse is as follows:

The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue
Be found in their mouths;
For they will feed and lie down
With no one to frighten them.

Yom Kippur

The importance of Yom Kippur—or “The Day”⁸¹ as rabbis would call it—cannot be understated. I describe this in plain terms as the day that sinners became de-sinned.⁸² Here is how it would happen:

The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on.”⁸³

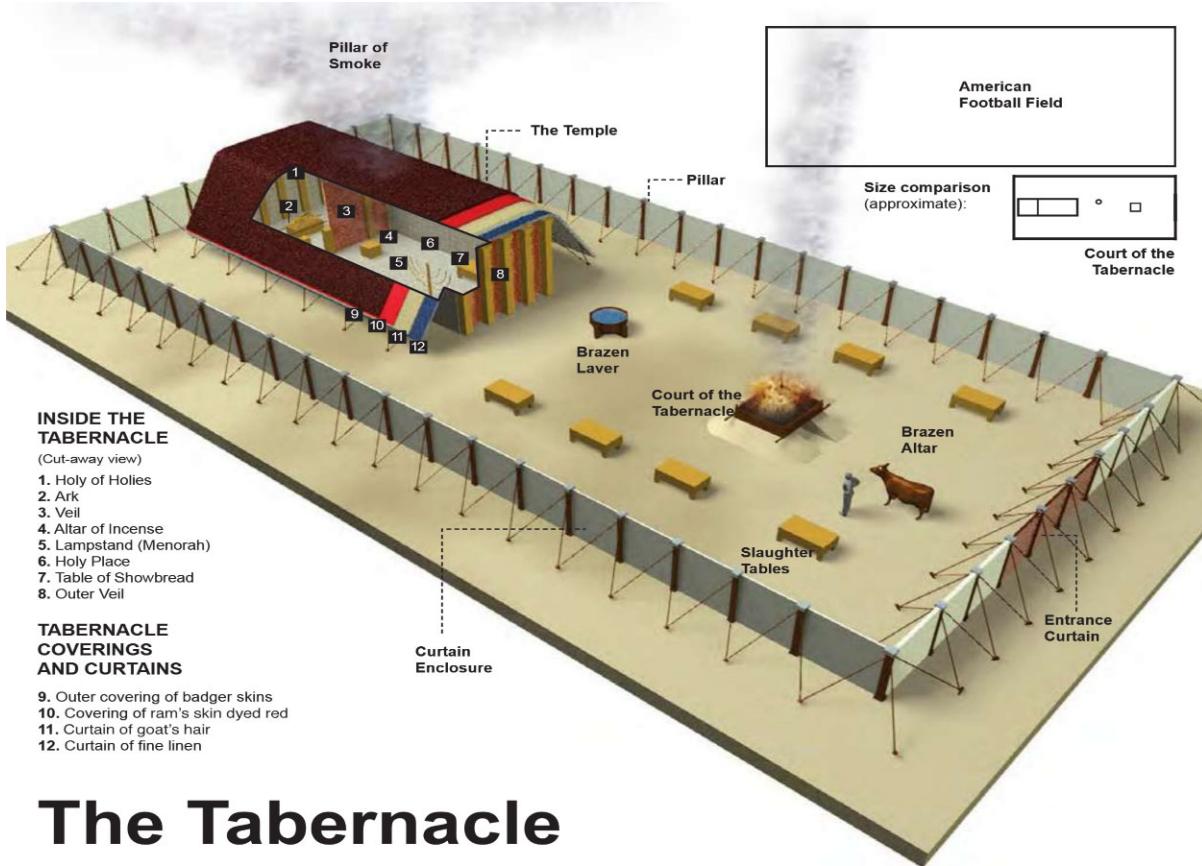
This is the most important ritual for all of Israel. It happened privately with Aaron and a few other priests assisting. So national forgiveness of sin happened through one man, Aaron. Figure 4 below shows a physical layout of the Tabernacle. The particular features to note are numbered one through three. This is the “Holy of Holies” protected by a heavy veil where the Ark of the covenant resided.⁸⁴ The Holy of Holies was such a sacred place that God said that only the high priest, Aaron at the time, could enter, and only one time per year. And before doing so, Aaron was to perform a purifying ritual within the Temple.

⁸¹ James Luther Mays, *The Book of Leviticus and Numbers*, The Layman’s Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1963), 52.

⁸² The ritual involves a surrogate taking on the sins of all Israel. The surrogate suffers death. For it would be unfitting of a just God to allow sin to go unheeded. My review of the Scriptures suggests that God instituted the Day of Atonement to satisfy God’s need for justice in the face of sin, and, at the same time, demonstrate his loving forgiveness in a palpable way.

⁸³ Leviticus 16:2-3 ASV.

⁸⁴ The Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments and was covered by an atonement lid, which essentially symbolized a mediator between the law underneath it that Israel was bound to break and Israel itself.



The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the ark of the covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

GRAPHIC BY KARBEL MULTIMEDIA,
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Figure 4. Illustrated Depiction of the Tabernacle.⁸⁵

The following is a description of the purifying ritual led by Aaron:

He shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household. He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for [עַזָּזֵל] Azazel. Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for [עַזָּזֵל] Azazel fell shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness [to עַזָּזֵל] Azazel as the scapegoat.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 1 Kings 8:4.

⁸⁶ Leviticus 16:5-10 NIV.

By this ritual, two goats carry out the de-sinning of all Israel. One is offered to God, and the other is offered for “Azazel.” One rendering of this Hebrew word is “scapegoat”—a word we use today in the sense of taking the blame for someone else. Scapegoat is how the Hebrew word Azazel is translated in both the New International Version and the New American Standard Version. But as the translators of each acknowledge, the meaning of Azazel is uncertain.⁸⁷

Azazel – “Scapegoat” or “Demon”

The word azazel can not only be translated as “scapegoat,” but can also be interpreted as a proper name, Azazel,⁸⁸ which we see in the English Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, American Standard Version, and New Living Translation. With this translation, Aaron still offers two goats for national forgiveness, but instead of one simply being a “scapegoat,” it is an offering “to Azazel.” This proper name could refer to a remote wilderness place,⁸⁹ but the most reasonable interpretation is that Azazel is a reference to a demonic being.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The New International Version lists the meaning of Azazel as “scapegoat,” but contains a footnote that “the meaning of the Hebrew for this word [Azazel] is uncertain” (NIV, Ch. 16, footnote b). The New American Standard Bible also renders Azazel as the “scapegoat,” but contains the following footnote: “Or possibly, [the word means] Azazel (a name)” (NASB, Ch. 16, footnote j).

⁸⁸ Mays, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 53. Mays writes that:

Azazel is surely regarded here as a personal being. He may have originally been a pagan god or demon to whom unorthodox Israelites made sacrifice. When a goat for ‘Azazel’ was included in the ritual of the Day of Atonement the pagan practice was neutralised by joining it to the worship of the Lord, and ‘Azazel’ was marked off as evil, the source of sin, and hence the place whither impurity which had no place in the congregation, could be returned.

⁸⁹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 160. The term, Azazel, is said to refer to the “entire removal of sin and guilt from sacred places into desert on back of goat.” Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Enhanced BDB Lexicon*, 160.

⁹⁰ David P. Wright, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 536. Wright states that “understanding ‘ăzā’zēl as an epithet of a demonic personality is the most reasonable.” Wright reasons as follows:

The main evidences for [Azazel as a demonic personality] are:

(a) Lev 16:8 prescribes that Aaron is to place a lot on each of the two goats provided by the Israelites. One lot designates one goat as being “for Yhwh” while the other lot

Judit Blair argues that Azazel is an uncertain term and finds fault with the conclusion that it is a spiritual being. She writes: “We cannot draw any conclusions regarding the meaning of the term, it remains unknown. The parallelism with Yahweh in v. 8 suggests that it is a proper name of a supernatural being whose place is in the desert. However, there is nothing to suggest that it would refer to a ‘demon’ named Azazel. Despite the various efforts of scholars to prove otherwise, there is no evidence that a mythological figure was behind this term. Azazel’s significance in Leviticus 16 is its symbolic function. Azazel appears as the personification of the forces of chaos that threaten the order of creation; his role is to stand in contrast to Yahweh.”⁹¹

Taking Azazel as a proper name, we see a deeper meaning in the ritual involving the second goat. It becomes a vehicle for the physical sending away of sin into a place of destruction.⁹²

It would seem at first glance that the lot falling on the first goat sacrificed on the altar was a bad one, and lucky was the live goat. But this is backwards. The live goat

designates the other goat as being “for ‘ăzā’zēl.” As the first lot is for a supernatural being, Yhwh, so the second lot should be for a supernatural being of some sort.

(b) The goat designated for ‘ăzā’zēl is sent out to ‘ăzā’zēl in the wilderness which is one of the usual abodes of demons (Isa 13:21–22; 34:11–15; perhaps also Lev 17:7; cf. Tob 8:3; Matt 12:43).

(c) In pseudepigraphic literature Azazel appears as a full-fledged demonic being (1 Enoch 8:1; 9:6; 10:4–8; 13:1; cf. 54:5–6; 55:4; 69:2; Apoc. Ab. 13:6–14; 14:4–6; 20:5–7; 22:5; 23:11; 29:6–7; 31:5 . . .

(Wright, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 536).

⁹¹ Judit Blair, “De-Demonising the Old Testament: An Investigation of Azazel, Lilith, Debar, Qeteb and Reshef in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2009), 237, <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/3480>.

⁹² S. H. Kellogg, “The Book of Leviticus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible: Genesis to Ruth*, vol. 1., ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903), 304. Kellogg states that, “It is believed by a large number of the best expositors that the term [Azazel] must be taken here as the name of an evil spirit, represented as dwelling in the wilderness, to whom this goat, thus laden with Israel’s sins, is sent.” (Kellogg, *Expositor’s Bible*, 304).

bears “on itself” all of Israel’s iniquities and ends up in “a solitary land,”⁹³ its only company being the demon Azazel. Further, the first goat is the ritual instrument of God’s amazing forgiveness while the second “shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it.” (Lev. 16:10).

Concluding our look at Leviticus 16, the text presents us with a demonic being. Combined with the symbolism of the serpent in Genesis, there is a growing amount of Old Testament evidence for a literal Satan. Author William Caldwell goes so far as to say that rejecting this requires an “act of self-denial” when considering other interpreters before him and how Genesis presents the serpent as a “tempter, calumniator, and hinderer.”⁹⁴ But this is only the beginning of the scriptural evidence on the point.

“Satan” in the Old Testament

The noun “satan” (שָׂטָן) occurs 27 times in the Old Testament.⁹⁵ The word most commonly refers to an “adversary.”⁹⁶ For example, Solomon says that the Lord has “has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary [שָׂטָן] nor misfortune.”⁹⁷ Another example is where God’s anger was kindled because an angel stood in his way as his “adversary.”⁹⁸ In a vision of Zechariah, he describes the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and “Satan” next to him to accuse him.⁹⁹ It is clear from these examples that the word “satan” in the

⁹³ Leviticus 16:22 NASB.

⁹⁴ William Caldwell, “The Doctrine of Satan in the Old Testament,” *The Biblical World* 41, no. 1 (1913): 30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3142352>.

⁹⁵ K. Nielsen, “שָׂטָן,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green and Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 74.

⁹⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced BDB*, 966.

⁹⁷ 1 Kings 5:4 NRSV.

⁹⁸ Numbers 22:22 ESV.

⁹⁹ Zechariah 3:1 NIV.

Old Testament can simply mean adversary, but can also mean a “superhuman adversary,”¹⁰⁰ or to put it more directly, “Satan: the proper name for the Devil … an opponent of God and humans.”¹⁰¹

The clearest use of the Hebrew word “satan” as *the* Satan is in the book of Job. You may recall the story:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.¹⁰²

Satan delights in the task of making Job fall, and then carries out this mission. Author Marvin Tate correctly states that the Book of Job presents the “best known reference to a *satan* figure in the Old Testament.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced BDB*, 966.

¹⁰¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. “satan.”

¹⁰² Job 1:6-12 NIV.

¹⁰³ Marvin E. Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” *Review and Expositor* 89 (1992): 463.

While the Book of Job may supply the most lengthy Old Testament text supporting an actual Satan, the clearest one might be 1 Chronicles 21, which records that “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”¹⁰⁴ The use of the word Satan in this verse is not preceded by an article, making a strong case for it being a proper noun. Ryan Stokes suggests that this verse “represents the final stage in the development of the doctrine concerning a superhuman *satan*” in the Old Testament—where “*satan* became Satan.”¹⁰⁵ Stokes regards the use of the word in 1 Chronicles 21 as a proper noun. He further indicates that even scholars skeptical of an Evil One in the Old Testament admit that this verse likely refers to Satan by name.¹⁰⁶

Where Did Satan Come From?

So, if there is a Satan in the Bible, where does this being come from? A common belief is that Satan was a fallen angel kicked out of heaven. This derives from the final two Old Testament passages we will survey on the topic, which are from Isaiah and Ezekiel:

[from Isaiah]

How you have fallen from heaven,
 morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
 you who once laid low the nations!
You said in your heart,
 “I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne
 above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
 on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;

¹⁰⁴ 1 Chronicles 21:1 NIV.

¹⁰⁵ Ryan E. Stokes, “The Devil Made David Do It . . . or ‘Did’ He? The Nature, Identity, and Literary Origins of the ‘Satan’ in 1 Chronicles 21:1,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 91-106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25610168>.

¹⁰⁶ Stokes, *The Satan*, 6. Stokes urges that “the Hebrew scriptures do not use the word *satan* as a name, but simply as a common noun” for adversary, but still admits a “possible exception” in 1 Chron. 21.

I will make myself like the Most High.”
But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit.¹⁰⁷

[from Ezekiel]

... You were on the holy mount of God;
you walked among the fiery stones.
You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created
till wickedness was found in you.
Through your widespread trade
you were filled with violence,
and you sinned.
So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God,
and I expelled you, guardian cherub,
from among the fiery stones.
Your heart became proud
on account of your beauty,
and you corrupted your wisdom
because of your splendor.
So I threw you to the earth;
I made a spectacle of you before kings.¹⁰⁸

If these passages refer to Satan, it does make sense that the being was a fallen angel. Isaiah says, “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn,” and Ezekiel likewise says, “I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you.” But do these verses, which do not mention the word, actually refer to Satan?

Dealing first with the Isaiah passage, it has a problem of context when we have it apply to Satan. A few verses before, Isaiah says that the words will be a “taunt against the king of Babylon.” Thus, it seems more plausible that the verse refers to the Babylonian king that will be “fallen from heaven” as the “morning star, son of the dawn.” The word

¹⁰⁷ Isaiah 14:12-15 NIV.

¹⁰⁸ Ezekiel 28:14-17 NIV.

for “morning star” (בֶּלֶל hē·lēl) is literally a “light-bearing object in the sky.”¹⁰⁹ Both this and son of dawn, as images of intense light, do not seem fitting for the prince of darkness.¹¹⁰ But they are terms befitting of an earthly king who was so mighty that he “laid low” other nations, a king who is eventually put down by the mighty Yahweh.

The passage of Ezekiel also has a contextual problem in that it is addressed to “the ruler of Tyre.”¹¹¹ The prophet is thus calling out “the problem of the hubris and rebellion of the ‘prince of Tyre.’”¹¹² Some argue that the lofty language employed by the prophets must mean they are talking about an earthly king. Thus, neither of these passages seemingly refer to Satan.

Summary of Old Testament References to the Devil

There are numerous verses that are argued, sometimes twisted, to refer to a concrete Satan figure in the Old Testament. The above are the most legitimate contenders. But in the broader picture, the record is admittedly weak. There are 39 Old Testament books, 33,214 verses, and 503,493 words.¹¹³ Within that, we have identified three Old Testament books (Genesis, Job, 1 Chronicles), a handful of verses, and one word that might refer to an actual Satan. Some scholars would say there is no Satan in the Old Testament,¹¹⁴ and it is not surprising

¹⁰⁹ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. “בֶּלֶל.”

¹¹⁰ Ephesians 6:12 ESV.

¹¹¹ Ezekiel 28:1 NIV.

¹¹² Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” 470.

¹¹³ “How Many Words are there in the Bible?” *Waiapu Church Gazette* 36, 7 (1945): 11, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/WCHG19451001.2.24#:~:text=The%20Bible%20contains%2066%20books,181%2C253%20words%20and%20838%2C380%20letters>.

¹¹⁴ Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” 471. Tate, for example, concludes, “No passage in the Old Testament has to do directly with Satan (or the Devil) in the sense of later literature and Christian theology,” and “there is no Satan in the Old Testament.” (Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” 89).

to see why. They only need to view the few references we have looked at in a slightly different light. But the New Testament clarifies the picture.

New Testament References to the Evil One

The New Testament presents much more evidence of an actual Satan. “In the New Testament, the word ‘devil’ is used 32 times, Satan is used 33 times, Belial once (2 Cor. 6:15), and Beelzebul is used 7 times.”¹¹⁵ There are a number of titles given to the Evil One; John calls Satan the “prince of this world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11), Matthew references “the prince of the demons,” and Paul uses terms such as “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), and “ruler of the darkness of this age” (Eph 6:12).¹¹⁶

We come face to face with the devil when we see how he tempts Jesus.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹¹⁵ David Seal, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “seal.”

¹¹⁶ Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 988.

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.¹¹⁷

We will visit this passage again in a later chapter on how Satan operates, but here we lean on it for the truth that Satan is real and lives to tempt us. The New Testament writers and Jesus himself warn us time after time to be on guard against Satan.

I grew up with a genuine doubt about Satan. I would say at times that Satan was on par with Santa in terms of legitimacy. My favorite prayer was the Lord’s Prayer, and it only served to support my position—or so I thought. I was taught to recite the King James Version that ended, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.”¹¹⁸ “Deliver us from evil” seemed about right to me—not Satan, just evil.

But then I learned the hard way that this was all wrong. The King James Version of our Bible is over 400 years old and “deliver us from evil” is an unfavored interpretation.¹¹⁹ It is followed only in the English Standard Version and New American Standard Bible. Every other mainstream translation ends the Lord’s Prayer with, “deliver us from the evil one.” This includes the New International Version, the New Living Translation, the American Standard Version, the

¹¹⁷ Matthew 4:1-11 NIV.

¹¹⁸ Matthew 6:13 KJV.

¹¹⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: International Critical Commentary*, vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 614. Davies and Allison state that the word translated as evil in the KJV, “ὁ πονηρός is clearly ‘the evil one’ (masculine) in the Lord’s Prayer . . . the line means ‘deliver us from the evil one.’” (Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 614).

English Revised Version, and the NET Bible. The Message Bible says it well: we are to pray this, “Keep us safe from ourselves and the devil.”¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Matthew 6:13 The Message Bible. Two non-paraphrased versions of this verse are as follows:

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13 NIV).

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13 ESV).

Chapter 5: The Methods of The Evil One

It was 1999, and the Jacksonville Jaguars were “arguably the best team in the NFL.”¹²¹ But there was one particular team they could not overcome: the Tennessee Titans. The Jaguars lost to the Titans twice during the regular season, and then in the playoffs. “In each loss against the Titans that year, the Jaguars failed to score 20 points and had a combined 13 turnovers in those three losses.”¹²² The Jaguars did not have that many turnovers collectively for the entire season against other teams. Further, the Jaguars were undefeated that year against every other team they faced. So how could this be? The reputed answer: the Titans had the Jaguar playbook.¹²³

During WWII, Germany protected its top-secret messages and attack plans using the Enigma Machine. Poland was successful in cracking the Enigma to decode its messages, and the Allies had insight into Germany’s tactics and plans. “Breaking Germany’s most important cipher system helped in its defeat and shortened the War by at least one and possibly two years, according to some authorities.”¹²⁴

These stories illustrate how having your adversary’s playbook changes the game. Not a single team was successful in beating the Jaguars in 1999 except one—the Titans, who apparently had their playbook. The point of our detailed study last chapter was that we are facing

¹²¹ Alfie Crow, “Gregg Williams stole Jaguars playbook in 1999 playoff loss,” *SBNation Big Cat Country*, January 31, 2019, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230717104032/https://www.bigcatcountry.com/2014/1/31/5366914/gregg-williams-stole-jaguars-playbook-1999-renaldo-wynn>.

¹²² Crow, “Gregg Williams stole Jaguars playbook in 1999 playoff loss.”

¹²³ Crow, “Gregg Williams stole Jaguars playbook in 1999 playoff loss.”

¹²⁴ Louis Kruh and Cipher Deavours, “The Commercial Enigma: Beginnings of Machine Cryptography,” *Cryptologia* 26, no. 1 (2002): 1.

an enemy. Two-thirds of Americans believe this to be the case.¹²⁵ We are not in a battle simply against ourselves—we are called to put on spiritual armor for a reason, and that reason is Satan.

I wish it were not true, but I have laid with the enemy. I know too well how Satan works. So, we will draw on this experience and Scripture, which both inform us about the means and methods of the devil.

Satan's Greatest Deception is To Make Us Believe He Does Not Exist

The reason so much time has been spent to this point exploring both the Old and New Testament passages on Satan is because it is critical that we understand and believe that Satan is real. An enemy undetected will never lose. A major part of my unpreparedness (leading to catastrophic failure) was my lack of belief in a true enemy.

I had a notion of a Satan, but it was academic. It was based upon what I learned in Sunday school, reading the Bible, and learning about the devil and demons in seminary. That understanding was, while less informed than what is presented in this study, largely the same. I had an education that told me about Satan.

But there is a difference between being educated about something academically and believing it in your soul. Academic belief leaves room for intellectual exploration—I believe that Satan is real, but I am intellectually open to the possibility that the devil does not exist at all. How do you think your significant other would react if you said, “I think I love you, but I am

¹²⁵ Brandon C. Martinez, “Is Evil Good for Religion? The Link between Supernatural Evil and Religious Commitment,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 2 (2013): 319-338, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43186211>. “According to the 2006 Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity, 46.7% of Americans ‘strongly agree’ that the devil, demons, or evil spirits exist, and 20.1% ‘somewhat agree’ that they exist,” and a study the next year corroborated substantially the same sentiment with respect to “the devil or Satan …” (Joseph Baker, “Who Believes in Religious Evil? An Investigation of Sociological Patterns of Belief in Satan, Hell, and Demons,” *Review of Religious Research* 50, no. 2 (2008): 206-220, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447562>). Further, a 2004 Gallup Poll showed that 70% believe in the Devil. (Frank Newport, “Americans More Likely to Believe in God Than the Devil, Heaven More Than Hell,” *Gallup News*, June 13, 2007, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/27877/americans-more-likely-believe-god-than-devil-heaven-more-than-hell.aspx>).

open to the possibility that I do not”? And even if you did not say this, but felt that way, how would your relationship be? Would you open a joint checking account, buy property together, be fully devoted emotionally? Probably not. Belief impacts behavior.

The rest of this chapter is about Satan’s tactics and how to be vigilant against them. If the Bible were not enough to spur you into action, some statistics should not be ignored. First, studies show that a belief in supernatural evil can hinder the “natural tendency to free-ride and produce a greater sense of devotion,” which “strongly manifests itself in common measures of religious commitment.”¹²⁶ Studies further show that “religious beliefs, specifically those pertaining to supernatural evil, have a strong positive correlation with religious commitment.”¹²⁷

Satan’s Tactics from the Author’s Own Experience

“Keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, [be] steadfast in your faith . . .”¹²⁸

Later we will consider Biblical figures and Satan’s tactics employed upon them. But first, here is my own experience of how Satan turned a devout pastor, husband, and father into a complete trainwreck. In saying this, I do not mean to diminish personal responsibility. “The devil made me do it” is not a defense. Satan cannot *make* us do anything—the devil only partners with our sinful nature. It is our job to be prepared for how Satan works.

Coyotes are a cunning lot. They are pack animals by nature. But a single coyote will befriend a dog in its own yard. The dog feels invincible in that space and can defend it. But even as an enemy, the coyote is welcomed by the dog as a playmate. When the dog is sufficiently comfortable, it will accompany the coyote back to the pack, which spells the end of the dog.

¹²⁶ Martinez, “Is Evil Good for Religion?” 323.

¹²⁷ Martinez, “Is Evil Good for Religion?” 332.

¹²⁸ 1 Peter 5:8-9 NRSV.

Like the dog in the story, I was comfortable where I was and felt I had everything under control. My prayer life and other acts of worship dwindled to nothing. Sin bothered me less and less. I let the coyote into my yard and did not know I was playing with the enemy. Next, I had a new group of friends—friends that did not know God and had no aversion to sin. Of course, the Bible calls us to be a light to these people, but I was not their light at all. I was getting used to the dark. Everything became relative. The darkness in me felt like light because I was so deep in the dark. I was the dog comfortably strolling with the coyote on a path that led to death.

The lessons I learned from this are that: (i) no one is invulnerable, even a worship-loving pastor with a wonderful wife; (ii) anyone, no matter how blessed, can become discontent; (iii) no one can battle darkness without the light offered through prayer, Scripture, and worship; and (iv) no one can face Satan alone.

Looking back, these truths feel so obvious to me now, yet they slipped through my fingers. I will forever remember a stunning conversation I had with my 20-year-old son after my complete breakdown and total separation from family, church, and friends. Fortunately, he was still talking to me. He said, “Dad, how did this happen? You had it made. Mom was in love with you; she still is. You had a whole church who loved you. You had great friends. Why?”

When I came out of my coma, I suddenly had perspective, and that perspective has only become sharper over time. It is now crystal clear looking back that my marriage, ministry, family, and relationship with God were amazing. But because Satan led me to feel worthless in those things and discontent, I left it all for another life that was destruction.

As a long-time employer running a large law firm, I have learned something about retaining good employees: never let them start looking elsewhere. Pay them what they deserve, treat them fairly, and always keep them content—otherwise, when the headhunter calls, they will

listen. Then, an employee that otherwise would have stayed is gone for seemingly greener pastures. Satan will sow discontent in our hearts no matter how blessed we may be.

Second, Satan will gradually have us separate from the things that keep us content and spiritually strong—our Bible, prayer, worship and our family—our Christian brothers and sisters. That way, when we are off track, we hear nothing and delight in the road to destruction. We must pray for contentment in Christ and keep our friends and family close.

Lessons from the Serpent

“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”¹²⁹

Next, we look at what we can learn from actual interactions between the Evil One and Biblical figures. The first is the serpent and Eve. The dialogue opens with the serpent’s question, “Did God really say?” This is seemingly harmless. Again, the enemy is shrewd and crafty. These are some of the ways Satan approaches us today:

- Is it really bad for me to think this since no one else knows and I am not hurting anyone?
- Is it truly wrong for me to watch this in the privacy of my own home?
- Is what I am doing really something God cares about when there are so many bigger issues?
- Is my life really that good?
- Is God really treating me fairly?

Eve’s response to “Did God really say” reveals her sudden discontent. Before the serpent entered the picture, she was literally in heaven. She had a loving husband, everything she could

¹²⁹ 2 Colossians 11:3 NRSV.

want, and intimacy with God. But in an instant, something was not right. She was interested in the serpent. Otherwise, she would have taken offense at the serpent's questioning God and walked away. But she wanted to see what the headhunter was offering.

“When you eat of it . . . you will be like God,” the serpent says. All of humanity is seeing the offer for what it is—a lifetime of struggle with sin and evil—but Eve cannot. She is blinded by what is right in front of her. This is why Satan is called the Deceiver. The devil deceives us into embracing what leads to death as if it was true life. The serpent will make us think that God’s will for us restricts us from things we should enjoy. The serpent suggested to Eve that God forbids the eating of “any” tree in the garden, which would be ridiculous and is not what God said at all.

I have seen many people reject Christianity because of this exact tactic. Satan has them believe that “any” thing they like to do would be off limits, just like the serpent suggested to Eve that all fruit was bad. The key is not to fall prey to the serpent’s deception. Take a lesson from the three ways the serpent questioned God:

1. The serpent questioned God’s Word: “Did God say?”
2. The serpent denied God’s Word: “You surely shall not die!”
3. The serpent substituted a lie: “You will be like God!”¹³⁰

We must be vigilant against all three.

¹³⁰ Wiersbe, *The Strategy of Satan*, 19-20.

Lessons from the Wilderness

Matthew 4 records the devil's interaction with Jesus in the wilderness. The first question is not altogether different than the serpent's, "Did God really say?" The devil said, "If you are the Son of God . . ." In the garden and in the wilderness, Satan sets up God as the irrational one. Eve is surrounded by fruit hanging from trees everywhere, yet she cannot eat any of them (this is the serpent's false rendition of God's instruction). Jesus can turn anything into food, yet God has left him destitute in the desert. In both situations, God is painted as denying something beneficial without rational basis. This sets up Satan's alternate proposal as fitting and good—Jesus turn these stones into bread.¹³¹ Satan's alternate proposal was intended to have Jesus turn his focus away from God.

The purpose of fasting, as Jesus was in the wilderness, is not to deny us something good. The purpose is not suffering. Jesus was fasting to put his entire focus upon God. That is what worship is—placing our full attention upon God and responding to what we find. Turning stones into bread would break the full attention Jesus had upon God. So, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture about living on every word that comes from God.

Next, the devil invites Jesus to test God by throwing himself off the highest point of the temple. As support for the idea, Satan again cites Scripture as he did with the suggestion that Jesus break his fast. Jesus responded also by quoting Scripture that referenced the ancient Israelites wrongfully putting God to a test.¹³²

¹³¹ Matthew 4:3 ESV (cf. Exodus 16).

¹³² Matthew 4:7 ESV (cf. Deuteronomy 6:16).

Israel put God to the test after God had delivered the nation out of slavery in Egypt—a miraculous event. Still, Israel complained and asked if God brought them out of Egypt only to make them die of thirst or die by the sword of the people of Canaan.¹³³

Israel's reaction is truly something when taken in context. Israel was previously enslaved in Egypt. They were literally branded like cattle as property and relegated to forced labor.¹³⁴ By miracles, including the plagues against Pharaoh and the parting of the Red Sea, God delivered Israel. While waiting to enter the land God promised them, the Israelites were thirsty and there was no water around to drink. They literally said, "If only we had died in Egypt."¹³⁵ The Lord said to Moses in response to Israel: "How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down . . ."¹³⁶ But despite the rebellion, God did not do what God threatened.

So, while Satan cited Scripture within his invitation for Jesus to jump from the Temple, the invitation was against God in way similar to the actions of the Israelites discussed above.

Satan's final temptation is the most inciteful. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."¹³⁷ We are made in the image of God. Believers possess the spirit of God. The devil wants to separate us from the spirit of God—scary but true. Our response must be like Jesus'—revulsion. "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.''"¹³⁸

¹³³ Numbers 14:2-3 ESV.

¹³⁴ Ella Karev, "'Mark them with my Mark': Human Branding in Egypt," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 108, iss. 1-2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/03075133221130094>.

¹³⁵ Numbers 14:3 NIV.

¹³⁶ Numbers 14:11-12 NIV.

¹³⁷ Matthew 4:9 NIV.

¹³⁸ Matthew 4:10 NIV.

Judas—Satan’s Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

Our last Biblical story of Satan and his tactics is about Judas. We know from Scripture that it was the devil that worked in Judas.¹³⁹ One view of Judas is to see him strictly as a crook who has no interest in following his master’s teaching.¹⁴⁰ Another view may present him in a more sympathetic light as one who was trusted by Jesus and his peers to be the treasurer, and to carry out certain responsibilities such as making preparations for the festival, and giving alms to the poor.¹⁴¹

From one perspective, it appears that Judas was, under Satan’s influence, motivated by 30 pieces of silver to betray his Rabbi. This idea presents Judas as a complete crook motivated only by greed (John 12:5-6). But if we accept this idea, and the premise that Satan worked in Judas, the method of Satan is very direct. While this is possible, it presents Satan as a salesman that will try to sway us by walking directly to our front door. Satan presented Judas with the opportunity for money, and Judas fell for it. This is an easy explanation for the betrayal, but there might be a more compelling one—an explanation more consistent with my experience of Satan.

The money actually given to betray Jesus bought only an unimproved field.¹⁴² This suggests that the amount of money was relatively modest. Indeed, Judas did not think much of it because he brought all the money back. So, if it was not the money, what was it then?

There is not a lot about Judas in the Bible to answer this question, but there are some things we do know:

¹³⁹ John 13:2 ESV. “[T]he devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.” See also, John 13:27 ESV, “Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him.”

¹⁴⁰ John 12:5-6 ESV. Judas is described as a “thief.”

¹⁴¹ John 13:27-29 ESV. Judas holds the common purse, and is charged with making arrangements for the festival, and also giving to the poor.

¹⁴² Matthew 27:7 ESV.

1. He was called as a disciple just like the other eleven.¹⁴³
2. He was given an equal share in the ministry.
3. He spent night and day with the Son of God hearing his teachings and seeing his miracles.
4. As Judas was about to turn Jesus over to the authorities,¹⁴⁴ Jesus called him “friend” and told him to “do what you are here to do.”¹⁴⁵
5. As soon as Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, “he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests.”¹⁴⁶
6. Immediately after declaring, “I have sinned,” Judas hung himself.¹⁴⁷

None of these facts are consistent with the “he did it for the money” idea. Thus, another theory emerges. Suppose that Judas loved his fellow disciples and Rabbi. He dropped everything and devoted his life to Jesus’ ministry. But Judas’s roots of understanding Jesus’ teachings ran shallow, and he, like many, did not fully understand what Jesus desired to do. Now enter Satan, but not as the front door salesman that offered Judas a modest sum to betray everyone he loved. No, Satan knows that would not work. What is often overlooked when people think of Judas is

¹⁴³ Acts 1:17 NRSV. “[Judas] was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

¹⁴⁴ William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 202. Klassen argues that many Bible translations say “betray,” but the word in Greek does not necessarily mean that and could simply translate “hand over.” He argues that “the Greek verb *paradidomi*, which virtually always has been translated ‘betray’ in connection with Judas’s deed, does not mean ‘betray’ in any classical text we were able to discover; never in Josephus and never in the New Testament.” (Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend*, 202). This author continues that “more and more modern translators recognize this,” and the “early sources do tell us that Judas ‘handed Jesus over’ to the high priest, but that act came as no surprise to Jesus.” (Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend*, 202).

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 26:50 NRSV.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 27:3 NIV.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 27:4-5 NIV.

what it must have truly been like to do ministry day and night with a rabbi such as Jesus who turned water into wine and raised people from the dead. Imagine walking away from your career and family to do ministry with Jesus for three years! All the while your life is in danger—the Romans on one hand and the religious leaders on the other.

Satan could never crack this bond and devotion easily. It was a slow and systematic attack. Judas never saw it coming. Satan used his ultimate weapon; Satan made Judas believe that what he was doing was what God wanted. Satan had Judas believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but not a suffering one—a Messiah that would fight back against the establishment and bring deliverance that way. Just like the devil used Scripture in the wilderness with Jesus for his purpose, so Satan may have done with Judas, surely filling his head with the warrior-like Messiah from Scriptures.¹⁴⁸ So, Judas, drunk with Satan’s idea of what Jesus was really there to do, came upon the opportunity to hasten Jesus’ ascension to a military-like-deliverer and pocket some money at the same time.

Closing Reflection on Judas

This version of the Judas story feels more tragic and scarier than the Judas rendition that I grew up with (suggesting that he simply betrayed Jesus for the money). This version of the story shows that even someone walking next to Jesus is susceptible to Satan’s deception. If this interpretation is correct, it serves as a lesson that Satan has an incredibly effective weapon to use against us—a deception that can make us believe that when we are doing Satan’s bidding, we are actually doing something good, or at least partially good. It is shocking to see the aftermath of

¹⁴⁸ Sook-Young Kim, *The Warrior Messiah In Scripture and Intertestamental Writings* (United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 3. In this work, preacher and author Sook-Young Kim gives considerable treatment to the writings that led to the expectation that the Messiah would be a warrior. Kim writes that, “The conventional view of the messianic expectation has generally assumed uncritically that at the time of Christ the Jews were waiting for a Messiah who would be a mighty king and a militant warrior who would defeat the great powers of the world.” (Kim, *The Warrior Messiah In Scripture and Intertestamental Writings*, 3).

this deception, as I have, that lives can be ruined and loved ones deeply hurt. I truly hope that this alternative view of Judas (from what the reader may have heard) might lead to better spiritual preparedness.

Chapter 6: God's Plan for Sin and Satan—Victory

This study would not be complete without seeing how the story ends. We began in Genesis with the world in chaos, the evil that came with it, and the serpent introducing sin to humanity. That fall ultimately brought God's crowning creation to the brink of annihilation. The saving grace was God's remnant preserved out of love and forgiveness. The takeaway from this for our study is that God is faithful no matter how successful Satan may appear. God has armed us with the power of the Holy Spirit to face what is a daily struggle. Paul put it this way:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹⁴⁹

We can all identify with Paul's lament about the sin living in us making us prisoners. As Paul declares, there is deliverance through Jesus. I was rescued from the abyss by the miraculous hand of God and the work of the Spirit. Still, however, we are flesh and blood and the battle against the Evil One is constant. Will it ever end? The glorious answer is absolutely!

¹⁴⁹ Romans 7:15-25 NIV.

The book of Revelation promises a period of time where Satan is bound.¹⁵⁰ Revelation 20 recounts an angel coming down from heaven who seizes Satan “and bound him for a thousand years.” Over and over Jesus announced that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. After Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit came, and the number of followers exploded at that time. The Gospel has advanced since and lives are changed every day with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Arguably, these events—the coming of the Holy Spirit, the ensuing explosion of followers, and the advancement of the Gospel to almost every corner of the earth—is Satan being bound. Pastor, author, and professor, Sam Storms, presents this view of Revelation 20 and the binding of Satan in his book, *Kingdom Come*. Storms writes that “*the 1,000-year reign (i.e., the millennium) of Revelation 20:4-6 . . . [describes]* in symbolic language the entire inter-advent age in which we now live,” and “the 1,000-year period is no chronologically literal piece of history; it is a symbolic number coextensive with the history of the Church on earth between the resurrection of Christ and his return.”¹⁵¹

Satan is kept “from deceiving the nations.”¹⁵² Revelation 20:3 may be understood to mean that Satan can still act upon individual believers like he did with me. Satan is kept from deceiving entire nations, but not individual people.¹⁵³

Again, Professor Storm offers a helpful explanation:

Perhaps one of the principal means Satan hoped to employ in order to mobilize the nations for war was the pervasive spiritual darkness and unbelief in which they languished. But with the worldwide spread of the gospel, the necessary

¹⁵⁰ Revelation 20:2 ESV.

¹⁵¹ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Scotland, United Kingdom: Mentor Imprint, 2020), 428.

¹⁵² Revelation 20:3 NIV.

¹⁵³ In saying that Satan is only kept from deceiving entire nations, this does not mean that nations will not do horrific things. We do not need to look far back in history to seek atrocities committed by nations such as the warfare by Alexander the Great, the Crusades, two world wars, and more. But the “entire” nation was not on board with these atrocities. For example, there were detractors from what Hitler was doing.

power base from which Satan would launch his attack has been dismantled. In other words, it is the influence of the Church, as a result of the universal preaching of the gospel, which inhibits the activity of Satan in this particular regard. Though Satan still blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor 4:4), he is still providentially restricted [as Revelation 20:3 says where Satan is kept from deceiving nations] from hindering the pervasive expansion of the gospel throughout the world. Satan may win an occasional battle, but the war belongs to Christ!¹⁵⁴

This is a very exciting period in which we live. We are experiencing the arrival of the promised Kingdom, along with the binding of Satan. The Kingdom has been advancing as Jesus and his message are spread to the vast corners of the earth.

This view of the Kingdom and present reign of Christ was first articulated by Augustine (354 - 430 CE). Augustine agreed that the 1,000 years was not to be taken literally and was “an equivalent for the whole duration of this world.”¹⁵⁵ As for the binding of Satan during this era and what Satan can and cannot do, Augustine notes, as discussed above, that Revelation 20 does not say that Satan “‘should not seduce any man,’ but ‘that he should not seduce the nations’—meaning, no doubt, those among which the Church exists—‘till the thousand years should be fulfilled,’—i.e., either what remains of the sixth day which consists of a thousand years, or all the years which are to elapse till the end of the world.”¹⁵⁶

This does not mean Satan is rendered moot, only less effective as discussed above. We see that the first coming of Christ was a “deposit guaranteeing a glorious and tumultuous end to this age as we know it”¹⁵⁷ when Christ comes again as promised in the Bible (James 5:7 calls for patience as we await the “coming of the Lord,” and Hebrews 9:28 proclaims Christ will return “a

¹⁵⁴ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 442.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God” in *St. Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 427.

¹⁵⁶ Augustine, “The City of God,” 427.

¹⁵⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 67.

second time” ESV). Stories like my own assure us that, though Satan is still active, we are participating in Christ’s reign and see evidence of it in answers to prayer, story after story of lives changed through faith, and every new believer.

These things assure us that Christ will return. And when he does, it will be the end of Satan forever. So, we are to live day to day, rejoicing that the Kingdom is here now, but looking forward to Christ’s glorious return to bring an end to the Evil One altogether.

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